

It Is What It Is

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Drama, Tragedy

Language: English

Characters: Stoick, Valhallarama

Status: Completed

Published: 2011-10-05 19:07:34

Updated: 2011-10-05 19:07:34

Packaged: 2016-04-26 12:58:58

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,365

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Valhallarama considers a few things; namely, relationships and death. 1st prize winner at Sticks and Stones Forum's writing contest.

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Using my bragging rights to advertise, this won 1st place at the writing contest at the Sticks and Stones forum (google sticks and stones zetaboars to join!)

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><p>The world had gone mad. The methodical world of Berk had been turned on its head by something as seemingly minor as a little disease, the annual cold that blew through each year as regularly as the movement of the stars. Some years it reduced a handful of Vikings to sniffles and a fortunate fewer years it was all the more the bully.<p>

Stoick, for all his wisdom and pure stubbornness in running a village, was never the one to ask for instructions when a village was beset by illness. Valhallarama had seen it a few times before, those darker years. The man who was so often adamantly obsessed with every detail of tribe life was in a heartbeat without a clue of what to do.

Generations of Viking tradition, even traditions of the fiercest Vikings around, were no match for an invisible illness.

Valhallarama saw things differently. Tragedy was what it was. Healers and wise women had studied for years to produce a respectable offering of treatments, but the battle had not much changed since the beginning of man. No matter how many swords one had or how prepared to battle disease one had, it all boiled down to them being a little higher than the animals as they scrimped to survive. She had no

problem with that concept. In fact, not only was she at peace with it, but she rejoiced in it. Things lived, things died. All part of some great connection. Vikings challenged the world in different ways. They were a brave people who took life as a test they must win or die trying.

Though sometimes she was amazed at the different ways death brought about glory. Valhallarama had never thought about death much more than anyone else; somewhere in the back of her mind, however, she envisioned herself boldly taking down five dragons at the price of her life. That would be a saga worth telling over a fire. That sort of death was not one she particularly craved. But she was not altogether disappointed at what lay in store for her.

It was what it was.

Stoick didn't think so.

She had hardly seen him in what was approaching two months. The original feeling of missing him had long faded away to be replaced by a combination of a little heartbreak and pure resentment. What kind of man left his dying wife by herself while he went to doâ€¦ whatever was it that he did? More than half the village was sick. Those that could work had flung themselves whole-heartedly into necessary tasks. But only the necessary. So what was left for Stoick to run?

She rarely left her bed. At first her own stubbornness had made her fight against the heaviness of the late stages of the pregnancy as well as the fatigue of the sickness. But soon she recognized that her body did not have the strength to both fight the disease and satisfy her pride. The midwife had told her to rest, at least until the baby was born. And that was the majority of all the midwife said. There was no reason to say more. If Valhallarama had survived childbirth in her weak state it would be nothing short of a miracle.

Valhallarama was willing to concede to a miracle. She had been entirely grateful to survive, to come out of her dizziness to hold her baby son. Her poor health was reflected in his small size and early birth, but at least his cry was strong.

Stoick had disappeared for a week during that time.

All of her strength had been devoted to screaming at him when he did show up. What had been his problem? Where had he been? Did he not realize he had a family?

Stoick the Vast could shout with the best of them, but he never shouted at her. He had looked at her and the baby as if he were surprised to see both of them alive and mumbled something about not wanting to see her die.

That reply had humbled her a little. Stoick was nothing if not devoted to her.

Or at least in love with her.

She loved him, too, she supposed, in her way. They had had many a fine time together and there was no greater warrior in Berk. She had not been opposed to their betrothal, quite satisfied with it, in fact; but that did change the fact that there were others with whom

she would have been even more satisfied. Still, she had enjoyed the way he gave in to her every whim. Being the wife of the chief was nice enough status, and she did like Stoick. Just not as much as he obviously loved her.

But if he did love her so much, why couldn't he at least be around?

Before the sickness had struck the village with more audacity than it had in years Stoick had spent every possible moment with her. He had been thrilled with the prospect of the baby, had made all sorts of plans whether it was a boy or a girl. She had suspected he secretly wanted a boy, a son to follow him as chief.

So how come he still avoided them even after she had born him his desired son?

Her sister-in-law, hardy and strong against the affects of the disease, often came by to help, to nurse the baby while Valhallarama tried to sleep. For sleep was hard. She could not seem to sleep deeply enough for true rest, and part of her was terrified she wouldn't wake up.

Not a large part.

Once the baby was born, nothing else seemed to matter. She had done her duty as a mother, all that could be asked of her, and brought another future warrior into the world. A precious and beautiful little life. It was impossible for her to be so selfish as to wish she could see him grow up, as if getting to see him in these early days wasn't enough of a blessing. She enjoyed what she could, the way he fitfully slept next to her, his tiny body the only fire she needed to keep herself warm as her body grew weaker and colder.

She had accepted death, however it was coming. Why couldn't Stoick? She had been his wife for a short time, she had given him a son. What else did he want from her?

It seemed the only times he entered the little room was when she was asleep. She would wake up, see him lying next to her, and find herself too weak to say anything to him.

Maybe it was her own fault nothing was being said.

But if he did love her, he would speak first, wouldn't he? Or at least be around long enough for her to say something to him.

She had all sorts of things to say to him. Tell him how grateful she was for all he had done for her, how furious she was he couldn't be around when he knew she was dying, explain to him just how she expected him to raise their son because he clearly did not have a clue, how him leaving all the time and avoiding her was not going to change anything.

Tell him how much she needed him around at this time.

If he did love her, as she was so sure he did, why couldn't it be like it was before? Why could she not have every available moment of his time?

>For all the years she had known Stoick, she had known him not to be

a man of fear. Yet logic told her that everyone experience
fear.<p>

She supposed she could forgive him that much.

Though she still wished he was here.

She rubbed the baby's wispy hair, grateful that he, at least, was
nestled tightly next to her, and closed her eyes.

The End.

End
file.